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SUBJECT: FOUR VIEWS OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AND BEYOND

REF: LA PAZ 1619

Classified By: Acting Ecopol Counselor Brian Quigley  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) From July 18-24, Emboff met with four Constituent Assembly (CA) members representing different political parties. PODEMOS delegate Gamal Serhan Jaldin of Cochabamba argued that there is a real threat that the eastern (lowland) departments will seek separation from the western (altiplano) departments if their demands for departmental autonomy are not met. He also shared that the opposition is looking to put forward a unified candidate should there be a 2008 presidential election, and that PODEMOS leader Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga is willing to step-aside for the cause. Serhan mentioned he preferred to see Potosi Mayor, Rene Joaquin, a frequently mentioned presidential candidate, run for prefect of Potosi, thus allowing the opposition to control another department. Fridolino Duran, who represents the licit coca-growing region of the Yungas, and who is a member of the tiny AYRA party -- a party once affiliated with the MAS in the CA -- stated he has grown frustrated with the MAS over its coca policy and the GOB's closeness to Havana and Caracas.

¶2. (C) Loyola Viuda de Guzman, a MAS delegate, described the differences between the MAS and PODEMOS over homosexual rights and "right to life." The MAS supports gay rights in the broader context of civil rights, but Guzman stressed her party does not have a "homosexual agenda" (e.g. the promotion of gay marriage). Neither MAS nor PODEMOS is pro-choice, however PODEMOS has a more conservative position stating that conception should be considered the starting point for life. While the CA consists of many delegates with greater political aspirations, of the four delegates Emboff spoke with, Jaldin was the most politically savvy with a potential for a future in politics after the CA, possibly as mayor of Cochabamba. End Summary.

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A Two State Solution vs. Pact Politics  
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13. (C) On July 23, Emboff met with CA member Gamal Serhan Jaldin, who represents Cochabamba city. Serhan, a member of PODEMOS, sits on the Vision for the Country Commission, the CA's most polemical commission. Serhan confirmed press reports that commission president Felix Cardenas -- a member of CN, a small party closely affiliated with the MAS -- is the hardliner who has blocked the commission from issuing a true minority report, reftel. (Note: On July 30, MAS delegates in the Vision commission appeared to have finally backed down and have allowed PODEMOS' report to become the official minority report. End Note). Serhan characterized his commission as a microcosm of the CA, since essentially all issues are debated in his commission.

14. (C) Serhan discussed two possible outcomes for the CA, one in which the CA fails and leads to the possible division of the country, the second in which the MAS and PODEMOS reach a pact. Serhan believes that there is real possibility that the eastern (lowland) departments will seek separation from the west (altiplano) departments if their demands for departmental autonomy are not met. When queried about his department of Cochabamba, Serhan acknowledged that it would likely be the scene of violent confrontations since the department is divided between pro-GOB and anti-GOB supporters. Serhan then offered the alternative scenario in which PODEMOS cedes on the issue of multiple presidential re-elections in return for the MAS giving on departmental autonomy.

15. (C) Serhan probed Emboff regarding the Embassy's view on the CA and more importantly how the USG would respond to a true separation of east and west Bolivia. Serhan wanted to know if the USG is contemplating a response (i.e., conducting scenario planning exercises) and whether the USG would support a "two-state" solution. Emboff explained that the USG has one policy, to support a unified Bolivia.

16. (C) Serhan also provided his views on next year's elections (assuming the CA succeeds). Serhan explained that PODEMOS supports the idea of a unified opposition presidential candidate, but stated he didn't know who that candidate might be. He did explain that PODEMOS leader Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga is inclined to step aside and support the eventual unified candidate. Serhan mentioned he preferred to see Potosi Mayor Rene Joaquin, a frequently mentioned presidential candidate, run for prefect of Potosi, thus allowing the opposition to control another department. Serhan explained that in his home department, PODEMOS will likely support current prefect Manfred Reyes Villa, even though Reyes is not a member of PODEMOS. He offered that although Reyes is tainted and vulnerable, he is the only alternative for the opposition. Serhan mentioned that lower house president and MAS deputy Edmundo Novillo would be a formidable opponent for Prefect Reyes. Finally, Serhan explained that he is interested in running for mayor of Cochabamba city. He noted that current mayor Gonzalo Tercero is vulnerable, citing his alleged support for MAS militants during the January violence in Cochabamba city.

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An Insider's View of the Coca Commission  
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17. (C) On July 18 Emboff met with CA member Fridolino Duran who represents the licit coca-growing region of the Yungas. Duran is a member of the AYRA party, a tiny party with just two members in the CA. He serves on the coca commission, the first commission to issue its formal report, and one of the few commissions to have reached consensus. At the CA's inception AYRA members announced that they would ally themselves with the majority Movement Towards Socialism (MAS). Duran explained that while he and his party share many of the MAS' goals for greater social inclusion, he has become disillusioned with the MAS. Duran appears to have lost faith in the MAS for two reasons, the party's close ties to Venezuela and Cuba and its coca policy. He explained that his supporters (and Bolivians in general) do not want a socialist state, and many are leery of Caracas' and Havana's

involvement in Bolivia.

¶18. (C) On coca, Duran explained that during the commission's early meetings, the MAS proposed expanding legal growing areas into Bolivia's Amazon region, or essentially the entire country. According to Duran, he argued vigorously within the commission that growing coca outside of the traditional (and legally established) growing areas was bad for Bolivia in that it would increase narco-trafficking and would put at risk international assistance. Duran stated that he threatened to break with the majority if it did not relinquish their coca expansion plans. When his MAS colleagues refused to back down, Duran explained that he organized a group from the Yungas to protest outside the CA. Eventually, according to Duran, the protests succeeded in changing the MAS' position.

¶19. (C) Comment: Duran's coca commission anecdote provides yet another example of Yungas coca-growers challenging the MAS, to retain their monopoly on legal coca cultivation. Duran may also have been portraying himself in a positive light to line up USG assistance. He closed the meeting with a request for Embassy assistance in establishing a community radio station to counter the MAS' propaganda machine. End Comment.

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Two Views on the Commission on Rights and Guarantees  
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¶10. (C) Emboff separately met with Dr. Jaime Hurtado Poveda, the president of the Commission on Rights and Guarantees, as well as commission member Loyola Viuda de Guzman. Dr. Hurtado is a member of the opposition party PODEMOS, while Ms. Guzman represents the MAS. The commission issued majority (MAS) and minority (PODEMOS) reports because the two parties could not reach consensus on a few issues. Dr. Hurtado explained that the commission had general agreement on most issues, except on the concept of "right to life." The president explained that his party supports a right to life starting at conception.

¶11. (C) Ms. Guzman concurred with Dr. Hurtado's analysis that right to life was a dividing issue, but added that homosexual rights also separated the MAS and PODEMOS. Guzman explained that the MAS supports Bolivia's current concept of right to life which bans abortion, but does not establish conception as the standard for life. Guzman stated that PODEMOS opposes homosexual rights, while the MAS simply wants to incorporate them into the new constitution to reflect reality, that homosexuals exist within Bolivia society. She went on to state the MAS does not have a "homosexual agenda" (for example the promotion of gay marriage), only that the party believes that discrimination against homosexuals must not be tolerated.

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Views on Moving the Capital to Sucre  
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¶12. (C) Dr. Hurtado, a native of Sucre and a strong supporter of moving the executive and legislative branch to his home town, explained the arguments behind moving the capital from La Paz. Hurtado first outlined the standard arguments for re-establishing Sucre as the seat of the three branches of government. Hurtado explained that Sucre is seen as a more neutral location between the two mega-regions of the country (the lowland east and the altiplano west) that are currently in dispute. He mentioned that locating the capital closer to the emerging economic engine of Tarija is both logical and could reduce tensions between Tarija and the central government. He explained the usual historical claim that La Paz gained the capital due to the battle between liberals and conservatives at the turn of the last century. Using a twist of purely Bolivian logic, Hurtado argued that retaining the capital in La Paz would render illegitimate Bolivia's claim for access to the Pacific Ocean from Chile. Hurtado explained that if La Paz was allowed to retain the capital which it obtained via force, then Bolivia would no longer

have a moral claim to regain its access to the sea which Chile also acquired through force.

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Communitarian Justice  
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¶13. (C) Both Dr. Hurtado and Ms. Guzman opined on the hot-button issue of communitarian justice. Hurtado, a lawyer, towed his party's line that communitarian justice as a parallel form of justice (the MAS proposal) is simply an incoherent proposal. Hurtado offered that he would not oppose communitarian justice as a form of arbitration for small disputes (misdemeanors) within indigenous communities as it is currently practiced. Guzman, noting communitarian justice already exists in some communities, put forward essentially the same idea.

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Comment ) The Political Future of these Four Delegates  
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¶14. (C) The CA consists of 255 delegates, many of whom have political aspirations beyond the CA. Of the four delegates, Emboff spoke with from July 18-24, Gamal Serhan Jaldin was the most politically savvy with a possible future in politics after the CA. Serhan appears to be forming the political ties required for a run at the mayorship of Cochabamba. Serhan, whose father immigrated to Bolivia from Lebanon, may face some difficulties if voters see him as an outsider and not "authentically Bolivian." That said, he was successfully elected to the CA. Duran never overtly stated his political aspirations, but clearly is trying to make a name for himself (at least) in his native Yungas region. His request for help launching a radio station indicates he has political goals beyond the CA. Dr. Jaime Hurtado Poveda, a lawyer by training and leader in the Sucre bar association, did not express (or imply) much interest in pursuing politics beyond the CA. Loyola Viuda de Guzman indicated she wanted to return to her life's work advocating on behalf of the families of those people who disappeared during Bolivia's military dictatorships. End Comment.  
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